

Spent Fuel Project uses Innovative Methods to Stay on Fast Track

RICHLAND, Wash., October 13, 1995 -- The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Richland Operations Office is considering removal of 2,100 metric tons of deteriorating spent nuclear fuel from storage underwater in Hanford's K Basins, to safer and more economical dry storage in a vault facility that would be constructed in the 200 East Area. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project is being developed.

In 1994, DOE and Westinghouse Hanford Company established an aggressive schedule for the Spent Fuel Project that would have completed the project, a Tri-Party Agreement milestone, two years ahead of the original Tri-Party Agreement target milestone date of December 31, 2002.

In response to an initiative by Assistant Secretary Tom Grumbly, the Richland Operations Office and Westinghouse Hanford Company took on a challenge to advance the schedule even further to have successfully removed fuel from the K Basins by December 31, 1999, fully three years ahead of the Tri-Party Agreement target milestone.

In order to maintain the fast-track schedule DOE laid out, the project team planned to issue a Draft EIS for public comment by September 1, 1995, and to have a Record of Decision in place by December 31, 1995.

It is now clear that the Draft EIS schedule was overly optimistic. The Draft EIS will not be issued for public comment until November 10, 1995. This will delay completion of the Final EIS until March 29, 1996, and the Record of Decision, until May 6, 1996. "We intend, of course, to make every effort to accelerate that schedule," said Elizabeth Sellers, DOE's Manager, Spent Nuclear Fuel Project.

Officials expect this schedule set-back could potentially delay completion of the project by as much as four months. "This disturbs us greatly," Sellers said, "and we're now examining every possible way to return the project to the original timeline."

Decision-making authority has been granted to Hanford Manager John Wagoner by the Secretary of Energy to implement the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) on the K Basins Project, in addition to Acquisition Executive Authority and Safety Analysis report approval has been delegated to John Wagoner for the K Basins project. This has significantly improved the site's flexibility in reacting to unexpected changes which is helping keep the Spent Fuel Project on track.

Among other creative solutions being examined to recover the EIS delay are accelerated construction techniques, such as modular construction," said John Fulton, Director, Spent Fuel Project, Westinghouse Hanford Company.

"Any project of this magnitude and complexity on a fast-track schedule is likely to encounter unexpected difficulties; we can probably expect others," said Sellers. "What I want to stress today is that DOE and Westinghouse are unwaveringly committed to meeting the ambitious goal we set for ourselves and will work diligently and tirelessly to return the project to our planned schedule," she added.

"Regardless of how successful we may or may not be with these efforts, it is important to remember that we will still beat the Tri-Party Agreement milestone by as much as three years," Sellers said. "That achievement translates into dramatic safety enhancement, significant dollar savings, and a major step

forward in Hanford's mission and strategic plan," she continued.

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